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SUBJECT: OPERATION MOSHTARAK MOVING TO GOVERNANCE PHASE

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Classified By: Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry, for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).).

[11.](#) (C//Rel NATO, ISAF) Summary: Afghan and Coalition Forces carrying out Operation Moshtarak ("Together" in Dari) in Helmand Province are facing stiff challenges, but are on track to bring the "clearance" phase to closure. The Operation's success, however, will be measured in the coming "hold" phase when the Afghan Government, through its provincial and district leaders and key ministries, works with local shuras to quickly establish basic government services and introduce an effective security apparatus. Politically, preventing malign actors like former provincial Chief of Police Abdul Rahman Jan from establishing control of the ANP in Nad Ali and carving out a political role for himself in the district, will be essential to setting the district on course to manage its own security. The District Delivery Program (DDP) for Nad Ali is planned for roll-out the week of February 21, but securing competent line ministry officials to deploy there and in other key Helmand districts will remain a major challenge. In a meeting with Ambassador Eikenberry and UK Charge d'Affaires Cowper-Cowles, SCR-South Ruggiero and RC-South Commander MG Carter (UK) both encouraged keeping the DDP basic service packages simple and sustainable. Planning for Phase III of the operation in Kandahar is underway, with the Helmand operations already stirring political jockeying by various Kandahar powerbrokers. An early security briefing, yet to be scheduled, for President Karzai on the Kandahar operation will help develop his ownership of this politically sensitive operation. End Summary.

Operation Moshtarak

[12.](#) (S//Rel NATO, ISAF) Ambassador Eikenberry, UK Charge Sherard Cowper-Cowles, and USFOR-A MG Timothy McHale met with RC-South Commander Major General Nick Carter (UK) and U.S. Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) Frank Ruggiero at RC-South headquarters at Kandahar Airfield (KAF) on February 21, to discuss the on-going Operation Moshtarak ("Together" in Dari) in Helmand and plans for subsequent phases of the operation in Kandahar. The Operation at this stage is largely in Marjah, is "a war among people and therefore takes time," Carter said. Carter emphasized the lead role of the

Afghan National Army (ANA) in the fighting, which demonstrates its growing competence. The ISAF-Afghan Coalition Forces are being very cautious, and since the large civilian casualty incident on day two of the operation, there had been almost no civilian casualties, he said. He credited the "shaping" and "holding" phases of the "shape, clear, hold, build and transfer" strategy as the most important. For example, he said that the Coalition Forces had been able to "steal" parts of Nad Ali before the operation began as a result of the engagement by Nad Ali District Governor Habibullah with local shuras and elders.

¶3. (S//Rel NATO, ISAF) In those areas that have been cleared, the population is beginning to believe there will be change, Carter reported. Some Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) are deploying into the cleared areas and some cash for work projects have begun. Still, it will take two-three months of stability for local populations to begin to trust that these changes are real. We should expect, too, that the Taliban will attempt to return to the area and test the Afghan Government (GIRoA). The main fighters are now contained to two areas, with one expected to be secured soon by an ANA battalion, and the other to take more time. He noted that the remaining forces include foreign fighters who are very professional and their sophisticated bunker network will take time to clear and secure.

¶4. (S//Rel NATO, ISAF) Even after the clearing operations are completed, a key measure of success will be freedom of movement between the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah and the district. The Strykers have been deployed to support the mission, and line of sight checkpoints by the ANP are

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anticipated for some time to ensure ease of travel. Still, freedom of movement is not yet achieved on key routes, and will require adequate forces, likely from Marines currently in Northern Helmand. Carter emphasized that within six months, there will be significant requirements for Coalition Forces in Helmand and he does not foresee any significant withdrawals of Coalition Forces in the near-term. Ruggiero noted possible Iranian interest in the future Marine deployments into Nimroz Province, closer to the Iranian border than other U.S. bases, and away from population centers in the South. Ambassador Eikenberry said that even with the current limited presence of the Marines in Nimroz, ensuring transparency with the Iranians through appropriate channels to allay Iranian suspicions and paranoia will be useful.

District Stabilization

¶5. (SBU//Rel NATO, ISAF) The Nad Ali stabilization plan is expected to be launched on February 24 by Governor Mangal and IDLG Director General Jelani Popal. SCR Ruggiero said that planning includes deployment of District Governor Habibullah to Nad Ali. Within the month, he should have six to twelve officials to support the basic services package. Recruitment is on-going, although the Ambassador noted that the Director of the Civil Service Institute told him during a recent meeting that they are having difficulties getting the numbers as the entire approach to hiring civil servants to support on-going operations is novel. The first 80 new recruits by the IDLG are being trained, he said.

¶6. (SBU//Rel NATO, ISAF) The District Delivery Program (DDP) is a key element of the district stabilization effort. SCR Ruggiero said only about 10 districts really matter in the South and that they would provide an "85 percent solution." He and MG Carter agreed that DDP and other stabilization efforts need to be focused on ensuring that Nad Ali/Marjah and other districts have the following basic leadership and services: 1) a competent district governor; 2) a competent and untainted leader of the shura; 3) a representative shura that is not dominated by nor limited to one or two tribes or

local areas; 4) a good police chief; 5) a fully manned ANP tashkil; 6) assignment of four-five key administrative positions; and 7) flexible fund disbursement and hiring authorities for the district governor. They agreed with the Ambassador that there is a risk of creating an unsustainable "gold-plated" DDP and said they would keep an eye on "over-investing" in the districts.

¶17. (SBU//Rel NATO, ISAF) Addressing the physical structures in Marjah will also be important. Despite early information that the structures in Marjah would be in decent shape, the place is "wasted" said Carter. As a first step, they will need to build the incoming Deputy District Governor and his team an office, he said.

Human Capacity Will Slow the Momentum into Central Helmand

¶18. (SBU//Rel NATO, ISAF) MG Carter downplayed talk by some of using the momentum from the Marjah operations to expand governance and development quickly to the rest of the Central Helmand Valley. The greatest challenge, he and SCR Ruggiero said, is that government capacity is finite. While Governor Mangal is an excellent partner, his team is not large. He has a capable Deputy Governor in Satar, a strategic communications official described as a great "spin doctor," an "enforcer" in Shamzai, and a capable NDS chief (with whom Mangal has tense relations). Below that, they said, the provincial team is weak and dependent on support from the PRT. This relatively thin provincial leadership in combination with the limited district officials and services will impede rapid momentum to the other districts of Central Helmand, they said.

Dealing with the "ARJ" Factor

¶19. (C//Rel NATO, ISAF) Carter and Ruggiero both emphasized that ensuring strong leadership of the ANP is the most important factor in ensuring the long-term stability of Nad Ali/Marjah. "Getting the police right is essential to getting out," Carter said. Of greatest concern are perceived efforts by Abdul Rahman Jan (ARJ), the former Helmand provincial police chief, to install one of his people as police chief and effectively control the ANP in the district.

(Note: Nad Ali district native ARJ was removed from his position in 2006 after pressure from the UK as a result of

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his corrupt practices and incompetence. As police chief, he also used his position to promote loyal acolytes from within his Noorzai tribe, many of whom remain in place today. End Note.)

¶110. (C//Rel NATO, ISAF) ARJ is chairing a local 34-man informal shura that is not representative of the interests of Marjah locals, Carter said. The ARJ-led shura has been stymied to date in its efforts to vet the ANA and Coalition rules of engagement through the shura and to select the ANCOP Commander, but ARJ's leadership of the shura has locals terrified that he will be part of final political solution, Carter said. Carter and Ruggiero requested assistance in engaging with President Karzai and other key players in Kabul to prevent a scenario that places the powerbrokers in control of the ANP and other positions of leadership. Ambassador Eikenberry agreed on the importance of preventing ARJ and former Helmand Governor and current Senator Sher Mohammad Akhunzada (SMA) from being empowered by the clearing operations, because they are in part the reason we are in the fight we are today and would undermine rather than advance any long-term political solution in Nad Ali/Marjah. Cowper-Cowles agreed on the need to have alternatives to SMA and ARJ, but also said that any approach that completely sidelines the Noorzai would be unworkable given their links to Karzai.

¶11. (C//Rel NATO, ISAF) Carter and Ruggiero outlined their plan to develop a political engagement strategy for dealing with powerbrokers. Similar to their recent efforts with Col. Razzaq in Spin Boldak (Ref J), they will develop "redlines" relating to NATO/ISAF and U.S. interests vis-a-vis these powerbrokers, articulate these requirements to these key powerbrokers, and apply consequences if these lines are crossed. Additionally, by laying out these requirements, intelligence collectors will have a focus; Kabul-based embassies will have better clarity on these actors when engaging with senior GIRQA officials; and these guidelines will provide officers with something tangible to push at the tactical level. Ambassador Eikenberry expressed concern about the impact of our expanded presence in inadvertently supporting powerbrokers. As transactional relationships build up to provide life support to our personnel, the beneficiaries are often the powerbrokers. For example, USFOR-A, the U.S. Embassy, and Allies often cannot easily identify which Afghan leaders are actually benefiting from our huge amounts of spending in the country, although serious efforts are underway to gain clarity.

Preparing for Phase III of Operation Moshtarak: Kandahar

¶12. (S//Rel NATO, ISAF) Preparations for future operations in Kandahar are underway, but Ruggiero and Carter said they expect this phase to be much trickier on the political level. Kandahar is "everything" to Karzai and his allies, and his buy-in will be critical. On the political level, Ruggiero noted that "Governor Weesa is not Mangal," and it will be more difficult to find a political partner like Mangal in Kandahar given the role of Ahmed Wali Karzai (AWK) and other powerbrokers in the province. Carter said he expects a security delegation led by Governor Weesa to travel to Kabul soon to brief Karzai in a general way on the objectives of the operation in order to get him to take more ownership. Kandahar PRT Deputy Director Bill Harris noted that the Helmand operations are stirring up debate in Kandahar, and contrary to expectations that the Taliban will "contest their hometown," there is a growing sense that many Kandaharis want to work out a political solution.

¶13. (S//Rel NATO, ISAF) In a subsequent meeting with Task Force Kandahar and the Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK) Ben Rowsell, MG Carter and SCR Ruggiero highlighted the ANA's development, noting that all but one Kandak is Level One and that AWOL rate is 17 percent, which is considerably lower than many other provinces. The ANP "fill level" is about 60 to 70 percent and its provincial leadership is strong. Still, the role of AWK is insidious; he stymied a recent effort to remove the corrupt Panjwa'i district police chief, suggesting that he has alternate lines of control over the ANP. On the governance side, SCR Ruggiero noted that the DDP and other district stabilization initiatives will swing quickly from Nad Ali to Kandahar City. Harris added that districts in Kandahar are much more permissive than Helmand and could receive basic service delivery today, e.g. under DDP, perhaps obviating the need

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for fighting altogether.

¶14. (SBU//Rel NATO, ISAF) Ruggiero, Carter, and Harris emphasized the need to support power generation to Kandahar City. Ambassador Eikenberry pressed them to be realistic about how they invest development resources, and told them focus on finishing Kajaki and hooking it up to Kandahar rather than seeking interim investments in fuel purchases and large generator farms. Additional major investments are not presently on the table, he said. To invest USD 200 million to provide electricity on a temporary basis to a Kandahar City under the grip of a quasi-crime syndicate is not

prudent, nor a good use of limited development dollars, Ambassador Eikenberry said.

Structural Changes

¶115. (SBU//Rel NATO, ISAF) To support the large-scale operations in Helmand and Kandahar, ISAF is expected to create a new Regional Command-Southwest, which will be led by the two-star Marine Commander and cover Helmand and Nimroz Provinces. Current planning is to stand this command up by August 1. To complement this structure, Ambassador Eikenberry told Ruggiero to continue his efforts to work with USFOR-A to requisition a "civilian platform" and appropriate staff to support the effort. To address UK concerns about competing senior civilians in Helmand Province, the Ambassador directed that the platform establish an office for the UK PRT Director, who could travel regularly to the platform. If the UK has the desire and capability to support the Platform, our Senior Civilian Representative would be prepared to serve as the UK PRT Director's deputy for purposes of over-all civilian coordination in Helmand.

¶116. (SBU//Rel NATO, ISAF) In Kandahar, Kandahar PRT (KPRT) currently reports to Task Force Kandahar, which has limited the focus of the KPRT. To fix this problem, Canada's field representation is prepared to have KPRT report to the SCR and the RC-South Commander, Rowswell said. Per Ref K, Canadian Ambassador Crosbie made a similar commitment to Ambassador Eikenberry the previous day. Similar to the structures in Helmand, KPRT would thereby support both Task Forces in Kandahar (TFK and Task Force Stryker. Rowswell said the priority of KPRT will be to support Phase III of Operation Moshtarak.

Comment

¶117. (C//Rel NATO, ISAF) Operation Moshtarak in Nad Ali/Marjah is the first step in a longer campaign to expand security and governance across the South. Getting the governance and security elements right will be an important indicator of whether the GIRoA is truly on a new path to establishing a competent, albeit basic, presence in the wake of our military operations or whether this is yet another clearing operation that fails to bring real change in governance and support for the local Afghans behind it. Our efforts to help sideline malign actors, prevent the ANP from being co-opted by local powerbrokers as we develop its capabilities, and support the provision of basic but appreciable government services will be essential elements of a successful strategy. However, our success will ultimately depend on President Karzai's having a similar vision, and he will be under considerable pressure to support malign actors like SMA, ARJ, AWK, and others in Helmand and Kandahar whose interests lie in maintaining parallel governance structures and biased tribal ties in lieu of a more representative GIRoA presence.

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